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G96-1296 Gear Up and Throttle Down -- Saving Fuel

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Gear Up and Throttle Down -- Saving Fuel

"Gear Up and Throttle Down" is a fuel-saving practice suitable for light drawbar loads (less than 65 percent of full power) when reduced PTO speed is not a problem.

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For the most efficient operation, a tractor's engine should be operated near its rated capacity. However, there are many field operations (such as light tillage, planting, cultivating, and hay raking) that do not require full tractor power. This is especially true when older implements, which were sized for a smaller tractor, are used with higher horsepower tractors. Also, many operations should be performed at a fixed field speed.

For these lighter operations, a substantial amount of fuel can be saved by shifting to a faster gear and slowing the engine speed to maintain the desired field speed, or "Gear Up and Throttle Down." An example of this procedure is shifting a manual transmission car or truck from second to third gear while reducing the throttle setting to maintain travel speed.

General Operating Guidelines for "Gear Up and Throttle Down"

1. Consider "Gear Up and Throttle Down" on light load operations (typically those requiring less than 65 percent of full engine power).
2. Stay within the engine RPM working range specified in the operator's manual.
3. Select a faster gear to maintain travel speed and implement productivity while reducing engine RPM.
4. Do not overload the engine. Check the engine response to the throttle setting and drawbar load.

Work, Power, Energy, and Efficiency

The fundamental definition of **work** is moving a weight or a force over a distance. "Foot-pound" (abbreviated ft-lbf) is a common unit of measurement for **work**. For example, to lift a 55 pound object 10 feet would require 550 ft-lbf of **work**. In the case of a tractor, if a force (ie. drawbar pull) of 3,300 pounds is needed to pull a disk and the disk is pulled 10 feet, then 33,000 ft-lbf of **work** would be done.

Power is the amount of work done in a given period of time. If the 55 pound object was lifted 10 feet in one second, the **power** required would be 550 ft-lbf/sec. Similarly, if it takes one minute to pull the disk 10 feet, the **power** required is 33,000 ft-lbf/min. The unit of measurement for **power** is horsepower. One horsepower equals 550 ft-lbf/sec or 33,000 ft-lbf/min. Both of the examples required 1 horsepower to complete the task.

Energy is the capacity to do work. For tractors, gallons of fuel consumed is a measure of the amount of **energy** used.

Efficiency is the amount of work done divided by the amount of energy used. For tractors, horsepower-hour (hp-hr) is the standard measure of work done. One hp-hr is one horsepower expended over one hour, which is equivalent to 1,980,000 ft-lbf of work. Horsepower-hours per gallon (hp-hr/gal) of fuel is a common measure of tractor engine **efficiency**. Hp-hr/gal can be calculated from either PTO (power-take-off) or drawbar power. The hp-hr/gal values from the PTO tests will be higher than the drawbar observations due to traction inefficiencies.

Fuel efficiency (hp-hr/gal) is not generally affected by engine size and can be used to compare the fuel efficiency of different sizes of tractors. Higher values of hp-hr/gal indicate greater fuel efficiency in the same way that higher miles per gallon indicate a better fuel economy for highway vehicles. For diesel tractor engines, 13.5 hp-hr/gal would be an average fuel efficiency for drawbar loads while a very efficient tractor can achieve 18.5 hp-hr/gal on the PTO. Increased fuel efficiency is the advantage of "Gear Up and Throttle Down" practice.

DRAWBACK -- PTO Operations

There are a few drawbacks with "Gear Up and Throttle Down." When engine speed is reduced, reaction time of the tractor hydraulics will be slower, and PTO speed is correspondingly reduced. When PTO speed is reduced, the PTO-driven device may have unacceptable performance and/or reduced productivity. For some load conditions, reduced PTO speeds can reduce the PTO-driven unit's life and cause failure of drive lines.

Tractor Test Data

The fuel saving benefit of the "Gear Up and Throttle Down" practice is confirmed by the University of Nebraska Tractor Tests. Information on fuel efficiency is given in five of the drawbar performance tests (see two examples in Figures 1-a and -b).

NEBRASKA OECD TRACTOR TEST 1664—SUMMARY 131					
JOHN DEERE 7600 POWRQUAD DIESEL					
16 SPEED					
POWER TAKE-OFF PERFORMANCE					
Power HP (kW)	Crank shaft speed rpm	Gal/hr (l/h)	lb/hp·hr (kg/kW·h)	Hp·hr/gal (kW·h/l)	Mean Atmospheric Conditions
MAXIMUM POWER AND FUEL CONSUMPTION					
Rated Engine Speed (PTO speed—1006 rpm)					
110.90 (82.70)	2099	6.46 (24.45)	0.405 (0.246)	17.17 (3.38)	
Maximum Power (2 hours)					
113.04 (84.30)	2009	6.42 (24.32)	0.395 (0.241)	17.60 (3.47)	
VARYING POWER AND FUEL CONSUMPTION					
110.90 (82.70)	2099	6.46 (24.45)	0.405 (0.246)	17.17 (3.38)	Air temperature
97.91 (73.01)	2180	5.99 (22.69)	0.426 (0.259)	16.34 (3.22)	75°F (24°C)
74.50 (55.56)	2211	5.09 (19.26)	0.475 (0.289)	14.64 (2.88)	Relative humidity
50.32 (37.52)	2241	4.14 (15.67)	0.572 (0.348)	12.16 (2.39)	31%
25.47 (18.99)	2268	3.19 (12.08)	0.872 (0.530)	7.98 (1.57)	Barometer
0.42 (0.31)	2294	2.24 (8.49)	37.247 (22.657)	0.19 (0.04)	29.20" Hg (98.87 kPa)
Maximum Torque 391 lb.-ft. (530 Nm) at 1351 rpm					
Maximum Torque Rise 40.8%					
Torque rise at 1698 engine rpm 24.0%					

NEBRASKA OECD TRACTOR TEST 1670—SUMMARY 138					
JOHN DEERE 8570 POWRSYNC DIESEL					
24 SPEED ALSO 12 SPEED					
POWER TAKE-OFF PERFORMANCE					
Power HP (kW)	Crank shaft speed rpm	Gal/hr (l/h)	lb/hp·hr (kg/kW·h)	Hp·hr/gal (kW·h/l)	Mean Atmospheric Conditions
MAXIMUM POWER AND FUEL CONSUMPTION					
Rated Engine Speed—(PTO speed—1109 rpm)					
208.21 (155.26)	2100	11.93 (45.14)	0.401 (0.244)	17.46 (3.44)	
Maximum Power (2 hours)					
230.84 (172.14)	1900	12.46 (47.18)	0.378 (0.230)	18.52 (3.65)	
Standard Power Take-Off Speed (1003 rpm)					
230.84 (172.14)	1900	12.46 (47.18)	0.378 (0.230)	18.52 (3.65)	
VARYING POWER AND FUEL CONSUMPTION					
208.21 (155.26)	2100	11.93 (45.14)	0.401 (0.244)	17.46 (3.44)	Air temperature
181.90 (135.64)	2158	10.68 (40.43)	0.411 (0.250)	17.03 (3.35)	75°F (25°C)
138.57 (103.33)	2188	8.62 (32.64)	0.435 (0.265)	16.07 (3.17)	Relative humidity
93.28 (69.56)	2216	6.56 (24.84)	0.492 (0.299)	14.21 (2.80)	33%
46.97 (35.02)	2239	4.38 (16.56)	0.652 (0.396)	10.74 (2.11)	Barometer
1.42 (1.06)	2260	2.83 (10.72)	13.950 (8.486)	0.50 (0.10)	29.23" Hg (98.98 kPa)
Maximum Torque 768 lb.-ft. (1041 Nm) at 1399 rpm					
Maximum Torque Rise 47.3%					
Torque rise at 1000 engine rpm 33%					

DRAWBAR PERFORMANCE									
FUEL CONSUMPTION CHARACTERISTICS									
Power Hp (kW)	Drawbar pull lbs (kN)	Speed mph (km/h)	Crank- shaft speed rpm	Slip %	Fuel Consumption lb/hp·hr (kg/kW·h)	Temp. °F (°C) cool- ing med	Air dry bulb	Barom. inch Hg (kPa)	
Maximum Power 7th (B3) Gear									
Test - 1 {	100.57 (74.99)	8948 (39.80)	4.21 (6.78)	2105	3.83 (9.27)	0.448 (0.273)	15.53 (3.06)	193 (89)	68 (20)
75% of Pull at Maximum Power 7th (B3) Gear									
Test - 2 {	79.77 (59.49)	6715 (29.87)	4.45 (7.17)	2191	2.46 (0.297)	0.489 (0.281)	14.24 (2.81)	189 (87)	72 (22)
75% of Pull at Reduced Engine Speed 10th (C2) Gear									
Test - 3 {	79.85 (59.54)	6709 (29.84)	4.46 (7.18)	1653	2.54 (0.263)	0.433 (0.263)	16.07 (3.17)	196 (91)	72 (22)
50% of Pull at Maximum Power 7th (B3) Gear									
Test - 4 {	54.46 (40.61)	4476 (19.91)	4.56 (7.34)	2223	1.72 (0.350)	0.575 (0.339)	12.11 (2.39)	186 (85)	72 (22)
50% of Pull at Reduced Engine Speed 10th (C2) Gear									
Test - 5 {	54.35 (40.53)	4490 (19.97)	4.54 (7.31)	1665	1.72 (0.291)	0.478 (0.287)	14.56 (2.87)	189 (87)	72 (22)

DRAWBAR PERFORMANCE									
FUEL CONSUMPTION CHARACTERISTICS									
Power Hp (kW)	Drawbar pull lbs (kN)	Speed mph (km/h)	Crank- shaft speed rpm	Slip %	Fuel Consumption lb/hp·hr (kg/kW·h)	Temp. °F (°C) cool- ing med	Air dry bulb	Barom. inch Hg (kPa)	
Maximum Power 8th (C1) Gear									
191.59 (142.87)	15225 (67.72)	4.72 (7.59)	2099	1.95 (0.263)	0.432 (0.263)	16.20 (3.19)	180 (82)	58 (14)	29.14 (98.68)
75% of Pull at Maximum Power—8th (C1) Gear									
149.53 (111.51)	11426 (50.82)	4.91 (7.90)	2172	1.51 (0.279)	0.459 (0.279)	15.23 (3.00)	180 (82)	61 (16)	29.10 (98.54)
75% of Pull at Reduced Engine Speed—13th (B4) Gear									
149.87 (111.76)	11434 (50.86)	4.92 (7.91)	1554	1.51 (0.255)	0.419 (0.255)	16.69 (3.29)	182 (83)	61 (16)	29.10 (98.54)
50% of Pull at Maximum Power—8th (C1) Gear									
101.71 (75.85)	7623 (33.91)	5.00 (8.05)	2204	0.88 (0.319)	0.525 (0.319)	13.33 (2.63)	176 (80)	61 (16)	29.10 (98.54)
50% of Pull at Reduced Engine Speed—13th (B4) Gear									
101.47 (75.67)	7626 (33.92)	4.99 (8.03)	1570	1.06 (0.278)	0.457 (0.278)	15.30 (3.01)	176 (80)	61 (16)	29.10 (98.54)

(a)

(b)

Figure 1. The Power-Take-Off and Drawbar Performance Results from Two Tractors: a) John Deere 7600 (NTTL Summary #131) and b) John Deere 8570 (NTTL Summary #138).

Test-1: Maximum Available Drawbar Power. In a gear selected by the manufacturer, the pull and travel speed are measured and used to determine maximum available power. This test is performed at full throttle.

Test-2: 75 Percent of Pull at Maximum Drawbar Power. In the same gear and at full throttle, the tractor is operated at 75 percent of the pull measured in Test-1.

Test-3: 75 Percent of Pull at Reduced Engine Speed. The tractor is operated in a faster gear with a reduced throttle setting. Pull and travel speeds are maintained about the same as in Test-2.

Test-4: 50 Percent of Pull at Maximum Drawbar Power. In the same gear as Test-1 and at full throttle, the tractor is operated at half of the pull measured in Test-1.

Test-5: 50 Percent of Pull at Reduced Engine Speed. The tractor is operated in a faster gear with a

reduced throttle setting. Pull and travel speeds are about the same as in Test-4.

During Test-3, most tractors use between 5 and 15 percent less fuel than during Test-2, while during Test-5, most tractors use between 15 and 30 percent less fuel than during Test-4. Only the throttle setting and operating gear changed between each of these two tests.

Test data from more than 500 diesel tractors are summarized in *Tables I and II*.

Average	Range of PTO Power (hp)				
	<40	40-80	80-120	120-160	>160
2WD					
PTO-Horsepower	28	59	99	137	173
Drawbar Horsepower (Concrete)	24	50	86	121	152
Test-1, Fuel Consumption (gal/hr)	2.0	3.7	6.3	8.5	10.7
Test-1, Fuel Efficiency (hp-hr/gal)	11.7	13.1	13.4	14.0	14.0
Test-4, Drawbar Power (hp)	13	27	47	66	82
Test-4, Fuel Consumption (gal/hr)	1.4	2.5	4.3	6.0	7.3
Test-5, Drawbar Power (hp)	13	27	47	66	82
Test-5, Fuel Consumption (gal/hr)	1.1	2.0	3.5	4.7	5.9
Reduction of Engine Speed (%) ¹	29	27	29	28	26
Decrease in Fuel Consumption (%) ¹	12	19	20	23	18
Increase in Fuel Efficiency (%) ¹	26	24	26	28	23
Number of Tractors	24	60	45	26	17
MFWD-Disengaged					
PTO-Horsepower	26	59	93	135	169
Drawbar Horsepower (Concrete)	22	50	80	119	149
Test-1, Fuel Consumption (gal/hr)	1.8	3.7	5.7	8.3	10.2
Test-1, Fuel Efficiency (hp-hr/gal)	11.5	13.4	13.8	14.2	14.0
Test-4, Drawbar Power (hp)	12	27	43	64	79
Test-4, Fuel Consumption (gal/hr)	1.3	2.4	4.0	5.8	7.0
Test-5, Drawbar Power (hp)	12	27	43	64	79
Test-5, Fuel Consumption (gal/hr)	1.0	2.0	3.1	4.7	5.7
Reduction of Engine Speed (%) ¹	29	28	28	23	24
Decrease in Fuel Consumption (%) ¹	18	18	22	19	19
Increase in Fuel Efficiency (%) ¹	22	23	28	24	24
Number of Tractors	22	55	22	15	5
MFWD - Engaged					
PTO-Horsepower	37	60	95	137	179
Drawbar Horsepower (Concrete)	31	51	82	122	160
Test-1, Fuel Consumption (gal/hr)	2.5	3.7	5.7	8.2	10.7
Test-1, Fuel Efficiency (hp-hr/gal)	12.4	13.5	14.2	14.5	14.5
Test-4, Drawbar Power (hp)	17	27	43	65	85
Test-4, Fuel Consumption (gal/hr)	1.8	2.6	3.9	5.7	7.3
Test-5, Drawbar Power (hp)	17	27	44	65	85
Test-5, Fuel Consumption (gal/hr)	1.5	2.2	3.3	4.8	6.1
Reduction of Engine Speed (%) ¹	23	22	19	21	21
Decrease in Fuel Consumption (%) ¹	17	16	16	17	16
Increase in Fuel Efficiency (%) ¹	21	20	20	21	20
Number of Tractors	4	43	50	21	18

¹Comparison of the results from Test-4 and Test-5.

Average	Range of PTO Power (hp)					
	80-120	120-160	160-200	200-240	240-280	>280
PTO-Horsepower	97	144	182	210	259	321
Drawbar Horsepower (Concrete)	69	126	161	195	238	302
Test-1, Fuel Consumption (gal/hr)	5.9	9.2	11.5	12.6	15.6	19.6
Test-1, Fuel Efficiency (hp-hr/gal)	11.3	13.2	13.7	14.9	14.9	15.2
Test-4, Drawbar Power (hp)	39	68	87	102	129	163
Test-4, Fuel Consumption (gal/hr)	4.4	6.7	8.3	8.7	11.0	13.4
Test-5, Drawbar Power (hp)	39	68	87	102	129	163
Test-5, Fuel Consumption (gal/hr)	3.5	4.8	6.1	7.0	8.5	10.8
Reduction of Engine Speed (%) ¹	27	40	34	29	31	29
Decrease in Fuel Consumption (%) ¹	21	28	25	19	22	19
Increase in Fuel Efficiency (%) ¹	26	38	35	24	30	24
Number of Tractors	3	3	12	17	20	22

¹Comparison of the results from Test-4 and Test-5.

These tractors were tested at the University of Nebraska Tractor Test Lab or tested from other OCED test stations during the last 20 years. Comparing the results of Tests 4 and 5, the advantage of using the "Gear Up and Throttle Down" practice is illustrated. Remember, travel speed, drawbar pull, and drawbar horsepower were the same for these two tests. Only a change in throttle and gear settings occurred. In Test-5, engine speed was reduced by an average of 26 percent; fuel consumption dropped an average of

19 percent and fuel efficiency increased 24 percent over the full throttle setting of Test-4.

Normally, "Gear Up and Throttle Down" can be used when loads require less than 65 percent of a tractor's power. It is generally safe to reduce engine RPM by 20 to 30 percent of the rated RPM. Check the Operator's Manual for specific recommendations for your tractor.

There is no justification for operating either turbocharged or naturally aspirated engines at full throttle when full drawbar horsepower is not required. Most tractor manufacturers indicate that the "Gear Up and Throttle Down" practice is suitable for their tractors and recommend the practice for fuel savings. Further, this practice could decrease maintenance, downtime, and expenses generally incurred from over-speeding mechanical equipment.

CAUTION -- Do Not Overload the Tractor

When using the practice of "Gear Up and Throttle Down," the most important thing to remember is NOT to overload or lug the engine. Excessive black exhaust smoke is one indication of an overloaded diesel engine. To check the engine for overloading, work the tractor for a short time at the desired speed and throttle setting. Then, rapidly open the throttle. If the engine readily picks up speed, it is not overloaded, and the original throttle setting is suitable. If the engine does not respond quickly, shift down a gear or increase the engine speed. Again, check for engine overload at the new settings.

EXAMPLE: Tractor Selection and Sizing

Suppose an operation requires 100 drawbar horsepower. You have a choice between two tractors. The first is rated at 101 drawbar horsepower (*Figure 1-a*) and the second at 203 drawbar horsepower (*Figure 1-b*). Should you use the small tractor at full throttle and full load, the large tractor at full throttle and 50 percent load, or the large tractor at 50 percent load but using "Gear Up and Throttle Down?"

Table III shows that the small tractor has the greatest fuel efficiency (15.5 hp-hr/gal). The savings is over 1 gal/hr compared to the full throttle operation of the large tractor. However, only a small difference (0.2 gal/hr) exists between the fuel used by the small tractor and the large tractor using the "Gear Up and Throttle Down" procedure. This shows that a large tractor sized properly for a light load will use about the same amount of fuel as a tractor half the size operating at full load. An added gain is the increased annual usage of the large tractor. This helps spread the costs of owning a large tractor over more annual hours of use.

Table III. Typical tractor size and operation comparison.

	Small¹ MFWD tractor	Large² 4WD tractor	Large² 4WD tractor
Throttle setting	Full	Full	Reduced
Percent load	100%	50%	50%
Drawbar Power (hp)	100.6	101.7	101.5
Fuel Consumption (gal/hr)	6.48	7.63	6.63
Fuel Efficiency (hp-hr/gal)	15.5	13.3	15.3
¹ John Deere 7600 (NTTL Summary #131), PTO-hp = 110.9 hp (Figure 1-a)			
² John Deere 8570 (NTTL Summary #138), PTO-hp = 230.8 hp (Figure 1-b)			

Remember, fuel consumption and engine efficiency can vary widely for individual tractor models.

Consult the Tractor Test Reports for your specific tractors when making an efficiency selection. Keep accurate records of the fuel usage of all tractors under a variety of operating conditions. With accurate records, an equipment system manager will be able to select the most economical tractor for a specific operation.

Remove Extra Ballast

Extra weight is used to properly ballast a tractor for field operations. Heavy draft loads require more ballast than lighter loads. If it is convenient for light loads, remove extra ballast to reduce rolling resistance and improve fuel economy as well as reduce the potential for soil compaction.

Summary

The fuel saving practice of "Gear Up and Throttle Down" involves reducing engine speed to 70 to 80 percent of rated engine speed, and shifting to a faster gear to maintain the desired field speed and implement productivity. This practice is suitable for light drawbar loads (less than 65 percent of full power) when reduced PTO speed is not a problem. Remember, **DO NOT** overload the engine.

If you "Gear Up and Throttle Down" whenever possible, you will be on your way toward getting the most for your fuel dollars.

For Tractor Test Information Contact

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Other Resource Materials

Five Strategies for Extending Machinery Life. University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension, NebGuide G95-1261.

Power and Fuel Consumption Data, Summarized for years 1984 through 1994, 2nd Edition. University of Nebraska, Lincoln. Agricultural Research Division Publication No. 9930.

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